

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-27. (cancelled)

28. (currently amended) A method for producing and printing a franking mark on a document postal article, comprising:

a) generating and storing a set of unique bit strings in a first memory in a central office connected to a plurality of terminals;

b) making available one or more of said unique bit strings to one of said terminals;

c) establishing an identification code;

d) transmitting data including a copy of said unique bit strings in combination with said identification code to said central office, and storing said data in a second memory;

e) generating a franking mark which at least comprises information relating to one of said unique bit strings and the identification code, and

f) securely printing the franking mark on the document postal article.

29. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 28, wherein prior to step f, the following steps are performed:

protecting the unique bit string and the identification code with one of the aid of a first message authentication code and by encoding;

storing the unique bit string and the identification code by a terminal on an information carrier with memory; and

performing step f after reading of the information carrier by a printing device.

30. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 29, wherein in addition to the unique bit string and the identification code, storing a terminal identification code, protected with one of the aid of the first message authentication code and by encoding, on the information carrier with memory by the terminal.

31. (currently amended) The method according to Claim 29, wherein after the reading of the information carrier by the printing device, use of the unique bit string for printing a further franking mark on a further document postal article is rendered impossible by the printing device.

32. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 29, wherein after reading the information carrier, it is checked whether the value of a counter on the information carrier

lies within predefined limits, and, if this is the case, the value of the counter is adjusted after reading and step f is executed, and, if this is not the case, step f is blocked.

33. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 28, wherein upon execution of step f, use is made of a computer and a printing device connected thereto.

34. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 28, wherein the identification code comprises at least one of a user identification code and a printer identification code.

35. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 29, wherein on the basis of the franking mark calculating a second message authentication code and printing in encoded format at least one of the second message authentication code and the franking mark.

36. (currently amended) The method according to Claim 28, further comprising the steps of reading in franking marks printed on ~~documents~~ postal articles,

storing combinations of identification codes and unique bit strings which are present in the read-in franking marks in a third memory and

comparing said read-in franking marks to said data in the second memory.

37. (currently amended) A system for producing and printing a franking mark on a ~~document~~ postal article, comprising

a central office and a plurality of terminals provided with a printer, wherein:

a. the central office is arranged to generate and store a set of unique bit strings in a first memory;

b. the central office is arranged to make available one or more of said unique bit strings to one of said terminals;

c. said terminals are arranged to establish an identification code;

d. said terminals are arranged to transmit data including a copy of said one or more unique bit strings in combination with said identification code to said central office, said central office being arranged to store said data in a second memory;

e. said terminals are arranged to generate said franking mark which at least comprises information relating to one of said unique bit strings and the identification code, and

f. each printer is arranged for securely securely printing the franking mark on the document postal article.

38. (previously presented) The system for printing a franking mark according to Claim 37, wherein, each terminal is arranged to store, after generating said franking mark, the unique bit string together with the identification code, protected by at least one of the aid of a first message authentication code and encoding, on an information carrier with

memory, and each printer is arranged to execute said printing after reading the information carrier.

39. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 38, wherein the terminal is also arranged to store, besides the unique bit string and the identification code, a terminal identification code, protected by at least one of the aid of the first message authentication code and encoding, on the information carrier with memory.

40. (currently amended) The system according to Claim 38, wherein the printer is arranged, after reading the information carrier, to render use of the unique bit string for printing a further franking mark on a further document postal article impossible.

41. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 38, wherein the printer is arranged, after reading the information carrier, to check whether the value of a counter on the information carrier lies within predefined limits, and, if this is the case, to execute said printing and to adjust the value of the counter after reading, and, if this is not the case, to block said printing.

42. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 37, wherein the system comprises a computer, said printer being connected thereto for executing said printing.

43. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 42, wherein the system is provided with means arranged remotely from the computer to send the unique bit string, together with the identification code, protected by at least one of a message authentication code and encoding, to said computer and to send said data to said central office.

44. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 37, wherein the identification code comprises at least one of a user identification code and a printer identification code.

45. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 37, wherein the system is arranged to calculate and print, on the basis of the franking mark, at least one of a message authentication code and the franking mark in encoded form.

46. (currently amended) The system according to Claim 37, wherein that the system further comprises central input means for inputting franking marks printed on documents postal articles, a third memory for storing the combinations of identification codes and unique bit strings present in the inputted franking marks, and processor means, connected to the central input means and the first, second, and third memories, for mutually comparing data in the second and third memories.

47. (cancelled)

48. (currently amended) Printing device that is structured and arranged for printing a franking mark on a

document postal article, said printing device at least being structured and arranged for receiving data from an information card, said data at least comprising a unique bit string originating from a set of unique bit strings,

    said printing device comprising means for compiling said data and making said data available for the franking mark for the document postal article in machine-readable form, so that said device can print the franking mark on the document postal article in the machine-readable form, said franking mark at least comprising said data as well as a code identifying said printing device.

49. (cancelled)

50. (cancelled)

51. (new) The method as claimed in claim 28, wherein said identification code is unique to each one of said terminals so that a point of origin of said postal article is determinable based on said identification code.

52. (new) The system as claimed in claim 37, wherein said identification code is unique to each one of said terminals so that a point of origin of said postal article is determinable based on said identification code.

53. (new) The method as claimed in claim 28, further comprising a step of:

g) mailing the postal article.